Experiments in Education

EDUCATION ON THE DALTON PLAN. By Helen Parkhurst. E. P. Dutton & Co.
MOONLIGHT SCHOOLS. By Cora Wilson Stewart. E. P. Dutton & Co.
EDUCATION FOR BUSINESS. By Leverett S. Lyon. University of Chicago Press.
BOOKLESS LESSONS FOR THE TEACHER-MOTHER. By Ella F. Lynch. Macmillan Company.
A SCHOOL IN ACTION. A symposium, with introduction by F. M. McMurry. E. P. Dutton & Co.

TAKING these five books together at least demonstrates the futility of any large attempt at standardization or uniformity in popular education. Each deals with a particular corner of the whole field and touches only incidentally upon the general problem, but each has a definite bearing upon that problem. It needs no demonstration to show that the enlightenment of neglected Kentucky mountaineers, most of them adult, calls for something other than the methods possible for a summer kindergarten or naturalistic school for the children of wealthy parents. But, going deeper than the superficial differences, it may be asked whether there is not a basic principle covering methods which may be capable of nearly universal application. Probably most progressive students of education will answer that there is such a basis and that it is to be found in so-called "psychological" methods in place of the bad old system of rigid authority and hard didactic imposition of tasks. The distinction lies, they say, between attempting merely to impart information and attempting to draw out, to educate (in the primary meaning of the word) the latent possibility of achievement in the pupil.

There can be no doubt but that the anti-didactic school has much the best of it, and has had ever since Froebel's day. But it needs a corrective inasmuch as the unregenerate human being, infant or adult, remains in need of some discipline, and it, unfortunately, remains true that there is still no royal road to learning. Of course the result is always a practical compromise wherever theories must be put into operation on any large scale. But in the case of select, small units the progressive innovations may show to signal advantage, as in the tests of the "Dalton Plan" recorded by Miss Parkhurst. The essential point of it is that "the children must be free." It aims at "laboratory" methods, wherein each pupil may conduct any experiment he likes. "The pupil," we read, "must be free to continue his work upon any subject in which he is absorbed without interruption." It has been tested to surprisingly good results in certain British schools and elsewhere. It may be suggested, perhaps, that any such system calls for an inspired genius as a teacher.

A somewhat analagous experiment is that of the "school in action," which records the results of a special school conducted in the New Hampshire hills in summer, with a very large expenditure of money, for the children of summer colonists and a few "natives" from the village. One of its ideas is that "knowledge of an art should be imparted by one who is himself a creator in that art," hence literature was administered by Padraic Colum, and music by Ernest Bloch. It is a highly interesting experiment, but probably its chief value lies in the observations of its psychological laboratory under the direction of Dr. Florence Mateer and Prof. Walter F. Dearborn of Harvard.

Miss Lynch's volume of advice to mothers is a valuable departure from the usual "mother's helper" book, in that it stresses the need of discipline and regularity, as well as that of inspirational suggestion. It is eminently practical and covers the field of home teaching very broadly.

Prof. Lyon of the School of Commerce of the University of Chicago makes a critical examination of the newly developed "business school," its aims and methods. He sees much room for improvement and for more intelligently ordered specialization.

Mrs. Stewart's eloquent account of the attempts to aid the forgotten mountaineers of Kentucky and other border or backward States is a moving book and has already had no small effect in spurring communities hitherto somnolent to some activity. The main point is that these neglected folk are in no way deficient or "poor white trash"; they are highly competent, naturally, but have been left behind in the forward swing of progress. Their response to volunteer offers of help was immediate and much has been done, but it is obvious that their rescue calls for wider governmental action. They are of the best of human material, too valuable to be overlooked.

HENRY WALKER.

Hardy's Workmanship

THE TECHNIQUE OF THOMAS HARDY. By Joseph Warren Beach. University of Chicago Press.

THE author of this enthusiastic bit of tilling a field which he himself declares is almost uncultivated remarks that his study of Hardy's novels is confined almost exclusively to their technique, with little attention to matters of subject matter, style or social significance, upon which so much discriminating comment has been lavished.

"In the case of Hardy," says he, "the reader must often wonder whether he was a deliberate structural artist, whether the occasional greatness of his work was not rather the result of a technique which came to him, as we say, by inspiration, and whether, indeed, the unfailing charm of his work, in whatever degree of greatness, is not something independent of questions of technique. . . . But structural art is a more important matter than it has been generally considered; the work of Hardy, like that of Meredith, suffered decidedly from the typical Victorian indifference to it."

Mr. Beach shows some impatience with Hardy's uneveness. "After he has found his own rich vein," says he, in "Far From the Madding Crowd," to undertake that abortive experiment in "comedy." "The Hand of Ethelberta"; after he had produced the Sophoclean drama of "The Native," to indulge in the almost childish melodrama of "A Laodicean!" Mr. Beach notes Hardy's outspoken strictures upon some of his own work, and remarks: "I fancy that Mr. Hardy, if he felt free to express an opinion, would be likely to pass more severe judgment upon certain of his performances than any of his readers. . . . *He* knows!"

The essayist declares that "Mr. Hardy never did get far out of range of his public." And he continues: "It is clear that he did not disdain the inherited tools of his trade. I will not say that he did not write for an ideal. But he did not set up an ideal without regard for the views of the reading world. He did not live in an ivory tower. The novel he conceived of as a piece of work for the entertainment of readers. He produced for consumption. He was bent on doing good work; but he was likewise determined to make a success. He was a regular craftsman, like Dickens, working for the success of his popular magazines; like Shakespeare, actor and manager, working over popular plays for the King's company, having in mind the motley audiences of the Rose and the Globe."

Mr. Beach classifies the novels in their divisions. In "Part One; Progress in Art," he includes "Desperate Remedies" as a work of ingenuity, "A Pair of Blue Eyes" as irony; "Far From the Madding Crowd" as largely a matter of stage setting, and "The Return of the Native" as drama. In "Part Two; More Craft Than Art," he includes eight novels as "relapse"; "The Mayor of Casterbridge" is "a movie," and "The Woodlanders" "a chronicle." And in "Part Three; Art and Craft at One," he sets "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" as a study in pity, and "Jude the Obscure" as a piece of truth.

Mr. Beach is clearly so great an enthusiast in the study of this master novelist that his delight in turning up all the odd corners of the field is often contagious. The characters of all the novels pass and repass a score of times through his sifting and weighing of motives and probabilities. He philosophizes upon details of Hardy's philosophy, and splits hairs with his author in respect of the reasonableness of sundry scenes and actions. And he finds in his gradual progress "a gradual and triumphant subordination of artifice to art. . . . The moral is obvious: It was not till he had mastered the *art* of novel writing that he really learned his craft."